



GROW WITH DR. SHIKHA

RESEARCH / MENTORING / ENGINEERING

A PRACTICAL WORKBOOK

Research Planning Starter

A six-part worksheet for graduate students and early-career researchers who want clearer questions, stronger evidence, and more useful mentoring meetings.

INSIDE

- Research focus and scope
- Evidence map and three-pass reading
- Method, risk, and integrity check
- Four-week momentum plan
- Mentoring meeting agenda

01 / FOCUS

Define the work before filling the week.

A useful research plan begins with a question, a reason it matters, and a boundary. Keep each answer precise enough to guide a decision.

THE QUESTION

What is the most specific question this phase of the project needs to answer?

WHY IT MATTERS

Who needs this answer, and what decision or understanding could it change?

BOUNDARY

What is intentionally outside the scope for now?

ONE VISIBLE OUTCOME

What evidence, draft, analysis, figure, or decision will show that this phase is complete?

DECISION TEST

If the outcome cannot be reviewed by another person, make it more concrete. Replace 'work on' with a deliverable and a completion condition.

02 / EVIDENCE

Read in passes. Record what changes the plan.

Use the first pass to judge relevance, the second to reconstruct the argument, and the third only when your work depends on a detail.

PASS 1**Relevance**

Question, method, conclusion, relevance decision

PASS 2**Argument**

Claim, evidence, method, limitation, possible use

PASS 3**Verification**

Definitions, assumptions, equations, data, cited sources

CORE CLAIM

State the paper's main claim in your own words.

EVIDENCE I CAN USE

Figure, table, result, quotation, or method detail - with its source location.

LIMIT / OPEN QUESTION

What does the evidence not establish? What needs verification?

SOURCE RULE

AI summaries, abstracts, and review notes are orientation tools. Verify claims in the original source before citing or relying on them.

03 / METHOD

Make the reasoning inspectable.

A strong method connects the question to evidence and makes important risks visible before they become expensive problems.

METHOD CHOICE

Why is this method appropriate for the question?

EVIDENCE PRODUCED

What observation, comparison, or analysis will it produce?

ASSUMPTIONS

Which assumptions must hold for the interpretation to be credible?

REPRODUCIBILITY

What must another researcher know to repeat or audit the work?

RISK CHECK

- ☐ Ethics or institutional approval confirmed before data collection
- ☐ Consent, privacy, confidentiality, and data handling are documented
- ☐ Variables, units, samples, exclusions, and uncertainty are defined
- ☐ Code, files, versions, and decisions can be traced
- ☐ Authorship, ownership, funding, and conflicts are discussed
- ☐ AI use complies with current university, journal, and funder rules

ESCALATE EARLY

Pause and ask your supervisor, ethics board, data owner, or institution when a requirement is unclear. A planning worksheet cannot replace formal approval.

04 / MOMENTUM

Plan outcomes, evidence, and decisions.

Give each week one visible outcome. Use the final column to name the decision, feedback, or resource that will unblock the next step.

WEEK	OUTCOME	EVIDENCE	DECISION / BLOCKER
1			
2			
3			
4			

WEEKLY CLOSE

Record what changed, what evidence was produced, what remains blocked, and the single most important outcome for the next week.

05 / MEETING

Arrive with evidence. Leave with decisions.

Use this agenda for a supervisor or mentoring meeting. Share relevant material early enough for review and keep responsibility for the work with you.

OBJECTIVE

What should be clearer by the end of this meeting?

PROGRESS

What has changed since the last meeting?

EVIDENCE TO REVIEW

Name the figure, table, analysis, draft, result, or source that supports the update.

DECISIONS NEEDED

List the specific questions that require feedback, approval, or a choice.

RISKS / BLOCKERS

What is slowing progress, and what would remove the block?

AGREED NEXT STEPS

Action, owner, evidence of completion, and date.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

This workbook supports planning and reflection. It does not replace supervision, ethics approval, institutional policy, or your responsibility as the author and researcher.

Continue with practical research guidance

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